

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

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P R 141541Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9092
INFO AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
AMEMBASSY BRAZZAVILLE
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
AMEMBASSY LISBON
AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE
AMEMBASSY LAGOS
AMEMBASSY KIGALI
AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY BONN
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 12969

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PDIP, AO, CG
SUBJECT: NEXT STEPS IN ANGOLAN/ZAIRIAN RECONCILIATION

REF: (A) STATE 200867; (B) LONDON 12848

SUMMARY: TANGANYIKA CONCESSIONS CHIEF EXECUTIVE
ALEXANDER HOOD SAYS HE UNDERSTANDS NETO IS PREPARED TO
ORDER THE REOPENING OF THE BENGUELA RAILROAD SHORTLY,
ALTHOUGH POLITICAL DIVISIONS IN THE ANGOLAN LEADERSHIP
MUST STILL BE OVERCOME. UNITA'S INTENTIONS ARE UNKNOWN
BUT KAUNDA'S INFLUENCE WOULD BE IMPORTANT. THE LINE
INSIDE ANGOLA IS IN SATISFACTORY CONDITION AND COULD

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REOPENED SOON DRAWING ON MATERIAL ALREADY THERE. THE
DILOLO BRIDGE IS NOT SERIOUSLY DAMAGED. THE CONDITION
OF THE LINES IN SHABA AND ZAMBIA IS LESS CERTAIN. HOOD
IS OPTIMISTIC THAT THE INTERNATIONAL RAIL LINE COULD
REPAIRED AND REOPENED WITH A MINIMUM OF DIFFICULTY ONCE
THE POLITICAL OBSTACLES ARE REMOVED, ALTHOUGH A SUB-
STANTIAL INFUSION OF PERSONNEL AND SPARES WOULD SUBSE-

QUENTLY BE NECESSARY TO MAINTAIN FULL OPERATION. END
SUMMARY

1. EMBASSY OFFICER SPOKE WITH ALEXANDER HOOD, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF TANGANYIKA CONCESSIONS, ON AUGUST 11 AND 13. HOOD SAID THAT HIS COMPANY HAS RECENTLY RECEIVED CONFLICTING SIGNALS FROM THE ANGOLAN GOVERNMENT ON THE FUTURE OF THE BENGUELA RAILWAY. THE GOA-APPOINTED BOARD DIRECTOR OF THE RAILROAD, FALCO, SAW NETO AUGUST 3, AND SUBSEQUENTLY REPORTED TO HOOD THAT NETO HAD BEEN EXTREMELY "POSITIVE" ABOUT REOPENING THE INTERNATIONAL LINE. NETO TOLD FALCO THAT HE WOULD SHORTLY ISSUE AN EXECUTIVE ORDER AUTHORIZING THE RE-OPENING AND THAT FALCO SHOULD MAKE ALL THE NECESSARY PREPARATIONS BOTH FOR THE RAIL LINE AND THE PORT OF LOBITO. FALCO TOOK THIS CONVERSATION TO MEAN APPROVAL TO INSPECT AND REPAIR AS NECESSARY AND SAID HE WAS OPTIMISTIC THE NECESSARY EXECUTIVE ORDER WOULD BE SIGNED SOON.

2. SUBSEQUENTLY, HOWEVER, THE MINISTER OF TRANSPORT TOLD FALCO THAT THE ISSUANCE OF THE ORDER WOULD DEPEND ON ZAIRIAN REACTIONS TO RECENT "UNDERSTANDINGS" REACHED WITH THE ANGOLAN GOVERNMENT. IT WOULD BE SOME TIME BEFORE THESE REACTIONS WERE CLEAR. HOOD REMARKED THAT HE HAD SEEN THIS KIND OF DICHOTOMY AND CONTRADICTION
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BEFORE, AND HE BELIEVES IT REFLECTS DEEP POLITICAL DIVISIONS WITHIN THE ANGOLAN LEADERSHIP. WHILE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT NETO'S INTENTIONS, HE HESITATES TO PREDICT HOW THESE POLITICAL FORCES MAY AFFECT A DECISION TO ISSUE THE NECESSARY EXECUTIVE ORDER.

3. HOOD CALLED THE UNITA FACTOR AN OPEN QUESTION. RESUMED TRAFFIC ON THE RAIL LINE WOULD PRESENT A TEMPTING TARGET FOR THE REBELS AND GIVE THEM AN AVENUE TO INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION WHICH THEY HAVE SO FAR LACKED PRESUMABLY, HOWEVER, THE ANGOLANS WOULD PROVIDE BETTER SECURITY ALONG THE TRACK. MOREOVER, KAUNDA IS MORE DEPENDENT ON THE SUCCESSFUL FUNCTIONING OF THE RAILROAD NOW THAN IN THE DAYS BEFORE 1975, AND HE MIGHT BE PERSUADED TO USE HIS INFLUENCE WITH SAVIMBI.

4. HOOD DESCRIBED THE PRESENT CONDITION OF THE TRACK INSIDE ANGOLA AS "SATISFACTORY". THERE HAVE BEEN NO REPORTS OF SERIOUS PROBLEMS. THERE MAY BE A SHORTAGE OF RAIL ON SOME STRETCHES, BUT THE LINE HAS UNDERGONE MINIMUM OF WEAR AND TEAR IN THE LAST THREE YEARS BECAUSE OF ITS INACTIVITY. A DETAILED INSPECTION WILL

OF COURSE BE NECESSARY, BUT MAINTENANCE STOCKS ALREADY
THERE SHOULD BE CLOSE TO ADEQUATE. HOOD WAS CONFIDENT
THAT THE LINE COULD BECOME FULLY OPERATIONAL IN A
REASONABLY SHORT PERIOD, AND POINTED OUT THAT TRAINS
NOW RUN AS FAR AS HUAMBO.

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5. HOOD SAID HE HAD FEW DETAILS ABOUT THE CONDITION
THE LINE IN ZAIRE AND SHABA, ALTHOUGH AN EMPLOYEE HAD
JUST RETURNED FROM A SURVEY OF THE AREA (KENNETH ROBBIE
WHO WILL COME TO THE EMBASSY AUGUST 16). HOOD'S IMPRES-
SION IS THAT THE KOLWEZI-DILOLO STRETCH IS OPERABLE
THAT STAFF AND MAINTENANCE ARE WANTING, AND THE LINE
COULD BREAK DOWN AT ANY TIME. HIS IMPRESSION IS THAT
THE LINES IN BOTH SHABA AND ZAIRE ARE PRACTICALLY
WITHOUT SPARE PARTS.

6. THE DAMAGE AT THE DILOLO BRIDGE IS NOT SERIOUS,
HOOD SAID. HE UNDERSTANDS AN ENGINE HAS BEEN DERAILED
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ON THE BRIDGE AND THAT A SPAR ON THE ZAIRE SIDE HAS
COLLAPSED. THESE ARE NOT DIFFICULT REPAIRS, HOWEVER,
AND THE WORK COULD GO FORWARD QUICKLY ASSUMING ADEQUATE
SECURITY IS PROVIDED. (ROBBIE SHOULD HAVE MORE DETAILS.)

7. MOST ROLLING STOCK IS IN GOOD CONDITION, HOOD SAID
BEFORE THE FIGHTING, THERE WAS AN INTERCHANGE AGREEMENT
AMONG THE THREE SYSTEMS, BUT WHEN THE LINE CLOSED ON
AUGUST 10, 1975, ANGOLA HAD A SURPLUS OF 700 WAGONS,
MOSTLY FROM ZAMBIA. THIS IMBALANCE CAN BE RECTIFIED
SOON AS THE RAILROAD REOPENS.

8. HOOD HAS FEW DETAILS ON THE STATE OF LOBITO PORT.
HIS UNDERSTANDING IS THAT NETO HAS ALWAYS RECOGNIZED
THE IMPORTANCE OF LOBITO AND THAT CONDITIONS THERE ARE
BETTER THAN IN LUANDA.

9. IN CONCLUSION, HOOD SAID HE WAS OPTIMISTIC THAT THE
INTERNATIONAL RAIL LINE COULD BE REPAIRED AND REOPENED
WITH A MINIMUM OF DIFFICULTY ONCE THE POLITICAL
OBSTACLES HAD BEEN REMOVED. HE STRESSED, HOWEVER, THAT
ONCE BACK IN FULL OPERATION, THE RAILROAD WOULD QUICKLY
NEED A SUBSTANTIAL INFUSION OF QUALIFIED PERSONNEL AND
SPARES TO MAINTAIN THE OPERATION AT PRE-1975 LEVELS.
HOOD SAID THAT THE "LONDON COMMITTEE" OF THE BENGUELA
RAILROAD IS SCHEDULED TO MEET HERE SEPTEMBER 12, AND
HE HOPES THE COMMITTEE WILL AUTHORIZE AN IMMEDIATE
MEETING OF THE GENERAL MANAGERS OF THE THREE LINES TO
DISCUSS THESE TECHNICAL PROBLEMS.
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